

County of Loudoun
Department of Planning
MEMORANDUM

DATE: May 14, 2009
TO: Mike Elabarger, Project Manager, Land Use Review
FROM: Kelly Williams, Planner, Community Planning
SUBJECT: ZMOD 2008-0013, Safeway Signs at Sterling Plaza,
Comprehensive Sign Plan, 2nd Referral

BACKGROUND

Safeway, Inc, the applicant, is requesting a Zoning Ordinance Modification (ZMOD) to permit a Comprehensive Sign Plan for the Safeway in the Sterling Plaza Shopping Center, pursuant to the provisions of the Revised 1993 Zoning Ordinance. The proposal is to specifically modify Section 5-1204(3)(D) of the Revised 1993 Loudoun Zoning Ordinance in order to increase the sign area for its building façade and allow more than three signs per façade. The proposal includes a statement of justification, a sign plan and illustrative drawings of the signs proposed for the development.

The subject site is located in the existing Sterling Plaza Shopping Center on the southeast corner of East Maple Avenue and Sterling Boulevard. The site is zoned PD-CC(CC) (Planned Development–Commercial Center, (Community Center)).

Vicinity Map



This is the second submission of the application. The applicant has responded to first submission comments by providing a revised statement of justification, response letter and Comprehensive Sign Matrix dated April 1, 2009. The remaining outstanding issues are described below. This referral is intended to be supplementary to Community Planning's January 20, 2009 referral.

COMPLIANCE WITH THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The site is located within the Sterling Community in the Suburban Policy Area and is governed under the policies outlined in the Revised General Plan. The Plan designates this area for residential uses (Revised General Plan, Planned Land Use Map). The retail policies of the Countywide Retail Plan (Retail Plan) also apply.

ANALYSIS

The proposed Comprehensive Sign Plan for the Safeway in the Sterling Plaza Shopping Center was reviewed using both the design guidelines provided in the Revised General Plan for Residential Communities and the Retail Plan.

Currently, the Safeway has one Safeway sign and logo, a Food and Drug sign, and two temporary signs, located on the windows, for the Starbucks and the SunTrust Bank. The proposed package includes two building-mounted Safeway signs and logos, two building-mounted sub-tenant signs (Starbucks and SunTrust), one building-mounted Pharmacy sign and logo, and one building-mounted Signature Café sign. The second submittal also includes a blade sign and updated ground-mounted sign that was not previously identified in the previous application.

Wall-Mounted Signs

In the first referral, staff recommended that the application be revised to include signage for all of the tenants in the Sterling Plaza Shopping Center, thereby creating a unified, coordinated sign plan throughout the entire development. The applicant has included a letter and concept sketch from McCaffery Interests, Inc., the landlord of the Sterling Plaza Shopping Center, regarding signage for the rest of the shopping center. The letter indicates that it is the landlord's intention to update signage throughout the center in the future, however, this proposal is not part of the application and does not provide commitments to a unified design as called for in the Plan.

Staff continues to recommend that the application be revised to include signage for all of the tenants in the Sterling Plaza Shopping Center, thereby creating a unified, coordinated sign plan throughout the entire development. However, if the application proceeds, staff requests a condition of approval that the Safeway signage be re-considered as part of any sign plan submitted for the overall Sterling Plaza Shopping Center.

The Sterling Plaza Shopping Center is located in a prominent location along a major roadway in the Sterling Community. The shopping center is located and designed to function as a "service area-based retail" use which serves the surrounding community

and is not intended to attract drive-by shoppers (*Retail Plan, Service Area-Based Retail Policies, text*). Service area based retail include “community retail centers” which are defined as those serving several residential neighborhoods with a market area of 2,000 to 8,000 households and offer a variety of daily and weekly shopping goods (*Retail Plan, Service Area-Based Retail Policies, policies 1 and 2*). As such, the majority of the shoppers should be aware of the center’s location and the available retail and service offerings, thereby limiting the need for excessive signage.

As stated in the first referral it is recognized that the signage at the Safeway may need to be updated to include a more current façade prototype, however additional signs along the frontage may be excessive. In general, all the proposed building-mounted signs exceed the square footage prescribed by the Zoning Ordinance. Zoning staff has identified that the calculations for the signs are incorrect. Community Planning staff is unable to fully evaluate how much additional signage is being proposed until such information is clarified.

There are concerns with the number, size and the possible redundancy of information presented on the proposed wall-mounted tenant signs and building-mounted which could contribute to visual clutter and detract from the overall quality of the retail/commercial center. Below is an example of the new Safeway store in the Broadland Village Center. This is a good example of how the scale and placement of signs provide adequate identification while not overpowering the façade. Staff could support a design more in keeping with the example below. In order to achieve such a design, perhaps the proposed Safeway sign and logo on the peaked roof line could be reduced in size or only contain the logo portion of the sign, to be more in scale and compatible with the signature café sign proposed on the other peaked roofline. This would help reduce the visual clutter and reduce the signage to be more in keeping with the Zoning Ordinance requirements.



The second submittal of this application proposes an additional blade sign which is to be located under the awning area of the store. The design of the blade sign matches that which is included in the landlord's illustrative for the entire center. As the landlord's proposal is not a part of this application, staff is concerned that this sign may not be in keeping with the center's design should the landlord decide not to update the signage in the future.

As stated above, this shopping center is existing and is surrounded by the existing residential community of Sterling. While an update of sign design and materials may be appropriate, given the nature of this community serving retail center and its visible location in the neighborhood, staff recommends that the signs be reduced in size and that the Safeway sign on the peaked portion of the roof be redesigned to be compatible with the signage proposed on the other peaked roofline. Staff further recommends that commitments made to the illustrative to ensure that the signage will be constructed as approved.

Ground-Mounted Sign

The application has been revised to include an update of the existing ground-mounted sign. It appears that the word "Safeway" has been enlarged and that the Safeway logo has been added to the existing sign.

Staff could support this change, if the wording and logo are reduced in size to match what is currently displayed on the existing sign.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The general concept of updating the signage for the Safeway within the Sterling Plaza Shopping Center appears to be consistent with the guidelines found in the Revised General Plan and the Retail Plan. However, as the Safeway is only a single tenant in the overall Sterling Plaza, staff continues to recommend that the application be revised to include signage for all of the tenants in the Sterling Plaza Shopping Center, thereby creating a unified, coordinated sign plan throughout the entire development.

Should this application proceed, staff recommends that the proposal be redesigned to reduce the size and content of the signs to be more in keeping with the Zoning Ordinance requirements as outlined in this referral. Commitments should be made to the illustrative to ensure that the signage will be constructed as approved.